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By Dr Daniel Drake.

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Gentlemen—

You have equal reason with myself, to regret the absence of that distinguished member,* to whom was assigned the delivery of an oration on this evening. Having, so recently, been appointed his successor, I should not venture to exhibit my crude and desultory performance, which has been hastily executed in the midst of pre-existing engagements, but for a conviction, that his removal has imposed on every member an obligation to augmented industry. Under this impression, and in the hope of your indulgence, I shall proceed with confidence in the execution of my task.

Our first year's labors were closed, by the interesting discourse, which has just been read. During that period, we have assembled, for literary exercise, more than twenty times; and our President has delivered, on Astronomy and Natural Philosophy, a variety of Lectures, equally eloquent and perspicuous. He has deduced from them sentiments both amiable and exalted, such as a philosophical survey of the works of God invariably excite; and has interspersed them with many impressive recommendations of the pleasure conferred by the acquisitions of knowledge. Thus, from his labors have resulted both instruction of the understanding, and improvement of the heart. The objects and character of our infant association have been defined and established; an impetus has been given it, and regular exertion only is wanting, to raise it into notice and respectability.

The essays of the members, if less learned and profound, have equalled all *reasonable* expectation. Some

* Josiah Meigs, Esquire.

of them consist chiefly of original matter, while others manifest a degree of research, which is honorable to their authors, and auspicious to the School.

It would be amusing to review their contents, but being restricted to limits too narrow for that undertaking, I will substitute a catalogue of their titles; that, by a single glance we may see the number and diversity of the subjects to which our attention has been directed. I shall enumerate them in the order of their delivery:

1 An Essay on Education—2 on the Earthquakes of 1811, 1812 and 1813—3 on Light—4 on Carbon—5 on Air—6 on the Mind—7 on Agriculture—8 on Caloric—9 on Gravitation—10 on Instinct—11 Notices of the Auroræ Borealeş of the 17th of April and 11th of September, 1814—12 an Essay on Water, considered chemically and hydrostatically—13 on Common Sense—14 on Heat—15 on the Mechanical Powers—16 on the Theory of Earthquakes—17 on Enthusiasm—18 on the Geology of Cincinnati and its vicinity, illustrated with mineral specimens and a vertical map—19 on the Internal Commerce of the United States—20 on Hydrogen—21 on Rural Economy—22 on the Geology of some parts of New-York—23 on General Commerce.

The third and subordinate portion of our exercises, poetical recitation, has been strictly performed; and our ALBUM of poetry already exhibits specimens indicative of a cultivated taste. The proposition to connect with the pieces recited, such critical remarks as they may suggest, has received some attention, and promises to give to this branch of our performances an interest and dignity which were not originally anticipated.

Such, briefly, is the character of our introductory labors. Their retrospection cannot fail to excite a portion of complacency and hope in ourselves, tho from our fellow citizens they may extort neither the meed of approbation, nor the humbler reward of occasional attendance. These, however, are certainly attainable. Our lot, gentlemen, is cast in a region abundant in but few things, except the products of a rich and unexhausted soil. Learning, philosophy and taste, are yet in early

infancy, and the standard of exeellenee in literature and science is proportionably low. Henee, aeqùirements, whieh in older and more enlightened countries would scarcely raise an individual to mediocrity, will here place him in a commanding station. Those who attain to superiority in the community of which they are members, are relatively great. Literary excellence in Paris, London or Edinburgh is *incomparable* with the same thing in Philadelphia, New-York or Boston: while each of these, in turn, has a standard of merit, which may be contrasted, but cannot be compared, with that of Lexington or Cincinnati. Still, comparative superiority in Europe, the Atlantic states, or Back-woods, is equally gratifying; and gives to him who possesses it, the same influenee over the community to which he belongs.

But it will, perhaps, be asserted, that in a state so young as this, *no* literary distinction is attainable, that would outvalue its cost; that academies and colleges are as yet scarcely instituted; that libraries, philosophical apparatus and scientific teachers are equally rare and imperfect; that associations for improvement, animated and impelled by a persevering spirit, can find no habitation in these rude and chequered settlements; and, lastly, that our countrymen are accustomed to look with frigid indifferenee on every species of literary effort. This is, indeed, pouring cold water on the flame of literary ambition: but that noble passion is not to be thus extinguished; and if a single spark remain, it will enable us to perceive, through the Gothic darkness which envelopes our literature and science, the certain tho narrow paths to a brighter region.

New countries, it is true, cannot afford the elegancies and refinements of learning; but they are not so unpropitious to the growth of intellect, as we generally suppose. The facilities of improvement which they furnish, differ from those of an old country, more in kind, than degree. In new countries, the empire of prejudice is comparatively insignificant; and the mind, not depressed by the dogmas of licensed authority, nor fettered by the chains of inexorable custom, is left free to

expand, according to its original constitution. But the sources of information are fewer, than in old countries; and in balaneing between the exemptions of one and the advantages of the other, it must be acknowledged that the latter has a great ascendancy. New countries, however, possess some positive and *peculiar* aids to the developement of understanding. Of these, the principal are to be found in the composition of their society. St. Pierre, in the preamble to his Arcadia, has made a beautiful allusion to this, when depicting an imaginary community of immigrants, assembled on the river of the Amazons.

"They abjured (says he) the national prejudices which had rendered them, from infancy, the enemies of other men; and especially that which is the source of all the animosities of the human race, and which Europe instils with the mother's milk into each of her sons—the desire of being foremost. They adopted, under the immediate protection of the Author of Nature, the principles of universal toleration; and by that act of general justice, they fell back without interruption into the unconstrained exercise of their particular character. The Dutchman there pursued agriculture and commerce into the very bosom of the morasses: the Swiss, up to the very summit of the rocks; and the Russian, dexterous in managing the hatchet, into the centre of the thickest forests. The Englishman there addicted himself to navigation, and to the useful arts, which constitute the strength of states; the Italian, to the liberal arts, which raise them to a flourishing condition; the Prussian, to military exercises; the Poles, to those of horsemanship; the reserved Spaniard, to the talents which require firmness; the Frenchman, to those which render life agreeable, and to the social instinct which qualifies him to be the bond of union among all nations. All these men, of opinions so very different, enjoyed, through the medium of toleration and intercommunication, every thing that was best in their several characters, and tempered the defects of one by the redundancies of another. Thence resulted from education, from laws, and from habits, a combination

of arts, of talents, of virtues, and of religious principles, which formed of the whole but one single people, disposed to exist internally in the most perfect harmony, to resist every external invader, and to amalgamate with all the rest of the human race."

A state of society analogous to this is actually presented by Ohio. In no country of the same age and numbers, do the immigrants exhibit more diversity. The sister states, from Georgia to Maine—the Canadas and West-Indies—the united kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the empires of Europe, from the shores of the Baltic to the Mediterranean, have contributed to increase and variegate our population. With the currents of emigration from those countries, have flown into this, many peculiar customs, manners and sentiments, which furnish the elements of a new national character, and display, if not the works of each, at least the principles on which they were designed and executed A society, thus compounded, has *within itself* no indifferent substitute for travelling; and exhibits, in the lapse of time, what belongs naturally to change of place.

It requires but little reflection on the comparative influence of these causes, and those, operating among a people regulated by a confirmed system of laws and customs, where the national character is uniform and the authority of precedent indisputable, to perceive, that the developements of mind which they effect, are on very different principles; and that the former have many advantages over the latter. To illustrate their relative effects by a metaphor, it may be said, that the operations of intellect, in an old country, are like the waters of a deep canal, which, flowing between artificial banks, pursue an equable and uniform course; while in a new country, they resemble the stream which cuts its own channel in the wilderness; rolls successively in every direction; has a current, alternately swift and slow; is frequently shallow; but always free, diversified and natural. The former is eminently useful for a *single* purpose—the latter can be made subservient to *many*.

For these differences, gentlemen, an additional reason may be assigned. Old states are abundant in the means of imparting elementary knowledge; new ones, in occasions for applying it practically. This is preeminently the case in the natural sciences, and to these chiefly I propose to advert. The larger and more common objects of a country are soon described; but these are not always the most wonderful or numerous. Productions exhibiting great complexity of structure, and connected with each other and with man by very surprising and complicated relations, are frequently minute, or neglected. In Great Britain, the strata, which had for centuries sustained the footsteps of successive tribes of geologists, have recently yielded, to the observations of Mr. William Smith, results equally new and interesting. In France, the vicinity of Paris afforded to Jussieu, more than a hundred new plants, after having been explored for forty years by the penetrating eye of Tournafort. More recently, the environs of the same city, for a thousand years the metropolis of the empire of physical science, have rewarded the genius and industry of Cuvier, with a rich museum of quadruped remains, the living archetypes of which the world cannot at this time furnish. If, in Europe, such enviable conquests were reserved for the naturalists of the present day, what vast acquisitions may not be made in the region of the Ohio, where the germs of civilization have not been planted more than half a century!

On this subject, gentlemen, our enthusiasm can scarcely rise to excess. We are surrounded by a boundless region, redundant in objects the most novel and inviting—where the strong may exhaust their mightiest energies; and the weak may find, in the luxuriance of the harvest, a substitute for strength—where gleaning is neither necessary nor practicable, and the time elsewhere employed in search of fruitful fields, is devoted to selection in the midst of universal plenitude. But let us descend to particulars.—The climate of this country exhibits many singular phenomena: To note and compare them with those of other climates, and

thereby to ascertain the laws peculiar to each and common to all, are objects of great interest to the Meteorologist, and remain to be accomplished. To observe the symptoms peculiar to our diseases, investigate their causes, and assign their remedies; to mark the succession of epidemics, and point out the means of preventing endemics, are duties of the first consequence, which the physicians of this country have yet to perform. To analyze and compare the varieties in our soil, and assign to each its appropriate species of culture;—to ascertain the extent and diversities of the great calcareous strata which support this region, classify their marine exuviæ, and investigate their marbles, their saline deposits and metallurgic precipitates; to explore the tracts of sandstone which are occasionally found, and bring to light their beds of coal; to survey and disintegrate our extensive alluvions, determine the process of their formation, their richness in iron ore, in copperas, alum, clays and ochres, their antiquity, and their vegetable and animal remains;—to collect and arrange specimens of the granite, mica-slate, gneiss and other primitive stones; which, detached from their kindred strata in the depths of the earth, are here scattered over the surface in profusion; to discover the region from which they were derived, and assign the species of convulsion which transported them hither;—to examine and point out, to the infirm and disordered, those mineral springs which possess a healing power;—and lastly, to analyze the waters of our salines, and increase their utility, by extracting from them, the sulphates of soda and magnesia, with other valuable medicines, are objects which offer to the Geologist and Chemist, and to society generally, a recompence of the highest order. To discover, examine and describe the plants peculiar to this region; to compare its general botany with that of other countries between the same parallels; to determine the latitudes of certain plants common to this and other states; to investigate and bring into notice such of our indigenous vegetables as would be useful in medicine and the arts; to search for species, which, by proper cultivation, would become ar-

ticles of nourishment; and lastly, to enrich our pastures with some of the numerous grasses which adorn our fertile prairies, would immortalize the names of a greater number of Botanists than the United States can at present boast. Finally, our Zoology, in the classes of quadrupeds and birds, would not furnish much novelty; but in the departments containing the more imperfect animals, many curiosities might unquestionably be found. Our fishes, reptiles, insects and vermes remain to be examined; and promise to those who undertake it, the reward of a distinguished reputation.

These, gentlemen, are some of the desiderata in our Natural History. Their number, variety and magnitude are scarcely surpassed by those of any country of the earth. They are at once the objects and stimuli of industry, the springs of ambition, and the fuel of enthusiasm.

To the Naturalist, they furnish the means not only of applying, but of extending, correcting and improving his elementary knowledge.

To the Philosopher of expanded views, they offer a theme for the sublimest contemplation. Directing his eye to the strata on which he treads, their marine origin is obvious, and he is instantly carried back in astonishment, to the era, when this great region, now overshadowed by lofty forests or embellished with farms and villages, presented nothing but a deep and interminable waste of waters. While eagerly attentive to the process, by which the habitations of its animals were converted into stone, at the bottom of this ocean, he is interrupted and suddenly called to speculate on the causes which produced its entire dispersion. The surface of the new made earth being exposed to view, his curiosity is excited by the formation of rivers. Where the grand and stately Missouri, Ohio and Mississippi now roll their currents, he sees nothing but depressions, abounding in ponds and morasses. Swelled by copious rains, he perceives these waters surmount their barriers, and accumulate in the south, until by their irresistable weight, all obstacles are borne down, and the impetuous torrent mingles with the ocean.

Descending from this period, he is occupied in contemplating the plants and animals of the new continent. Where submarine groves of red coral but lately grew, he sees forests of majestic oak arise. Where the sponge attached its slender forms, he perceives the luxuriant *maize** shoot forth, to nourish future nations. The tracts which were once encumbered with myriads of shell-fish, he now sees verdant with shrubs and herbage, infested with the rattle-snake and wolf, enlivened with deer and elk, or pressed by the gigantic forms of the elephant and mammoth, long since extinct. Lastly, in the lapse of time he is brought to contemplate the arrival of *man*. Observes, his progress from the north-west, his temporary locations by the way, and more lasting settlements on the banks of the Ohio. His enclosures of earth for permanent residence—mounds for the erection of temples—embankments for defence; and his manufactures of clay and shells, of stone and copper, constituting the achme of his perfection in the arts. Finally, to the unwilling view is presented the gloomy spectacle of exterminating wars, and decline in civilization; with his ultimate degradation into the present savage, his exile to some distant country, or entire annihilation.

Such, gentlemen, is the series of amazing and inexplicable events, which this country presents for examination; and which cannot fail to attract much of our attention. There are, however, many other subjects, which, if less brilliant, are of equal or greater utility. Whatever relates to the improvement of our agriculture, manufactures and commerce; to the perfection of our political and social institutions; to the economics, statistics and history of our infant state, is of the greatest consequence. But I have only time to expatiate on the last a single moment. Were the most intelligent young men of Ohio interrogated concerning the Indian war which closed in 1795, they could scarcely do more than relate, that Harmar was repulsed; that St. Clair was disastrous; and that Wayne conquered. With those

* The Indian name for corn.

details in which all *true* knowledge consists, they have no acquaintance, nor can they at present obtain it. With the schemes and stratagems, the inroads, murders and plundering of the enemy; with the cruel and insidious co-operation of Great Britain; the extensive combinations among the tribes, and their ferocious perseverance; with the captivities and suffering of our mothers and sisters; the watchfulness and intrepidity of our fathers and brethren; the hardships and courage, the defeats and victories of our troops; the character of our commanders, and the expenditures of our government, during that predatory and barbarous war, most of us are less acquainted, than with the campaigns of Bonaparte or Alexander.

To collect from the surviving actors in those tragical scenes, and from other authentic sources, the materials necessary for a true and minute history of that period, would be an undertaking worthy of an older institution than ours. Those who accomplish it, will appease the manes of many neglected heroes slain in battle; they must receive the gratitude of society, for supplying a great desideratum, and in future times will be honored, as the fathers of our history.

Gentlemen of the town—

The members of the School of Literature and the Arts solicited the honor of your company this evening, to exhibit before you a specimen of their labors; and to make you acquainted with the plan and objects of their humble association. They have done this, fearless of the imputation of vanity, for the sole purpose of engaging your good will towards an institution, which, if continued, may, under abler guidance, be made of public utility.

That you will not withhold the cheering reward of commendation, when their labors deserve it, your conduct this evening, with your general character, is an ample pledge. With that encouragement, they will diligently fan the spark that has been kindled, until it shall rise into a more bright and durable flame.

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